



Representative
Tom Petri
Reports
to The Sixth District

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Prosperous Future Likely

BY REPRESENTATIVE TOM PETRI

As Americans, we can all be proud of the strength and resilience of our economy. Despite the disruptions caused by the September 11th attacks, growth resumed during the fourth quarter of 2001, and could well end up at about four percent over the year ahead – essentially the top sustainable speed right now for a developed economy such as ours.

For most, the recession was short and shallow. The 7.1 percent drop in industrial production, however, made the past year painful for many factory workers and the communities where they live and shop. Also, the recession was a disaster for state and local budgets, as reduced economic activity cut into tax receipts.

High gasoline prices are a current concern. Tensions in the Middle East and Venezuela, with the possibility of embargoes and other disruptions, have caused energy companies to increase their reserves. At the same time, the OPEC oil cartel has had some success limiting supply, with high prices as the natural result. This is a worrisome drag on the economy, in addition to being a direct bite on the wallets of drivers generally.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic that our economy will be strong in the near term, and even more extraordinary as the years go by.

America's prosperity is no coincidence. We

have traditionally chosen to maintain a more open economy with more competition and room for personal initiative than most other countries. While taxes are always a burden, we keep them lower than most others. While we maintain a basic safety net, we provide considerable opportunities for people both to rise or fall based on personal initiative.

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As a result, we are well positioned to handle the revolutionary – and accelerating – technological changes now underway.

Computer speed per dollar spent is doubling every year or two, as it has been for decades. This is *exponential* growth, meaning that it starts slow but becomes extraordinarily fast. At first, you are in the realm of $2+2=4$, and $4+4=8$. Through this process of doubling, faster than most can imagine you're in the realm of $2,000+2,000=4,000$, and $4,000+4,000=8,000$. Plot it out on a graph and you will find a nearly flat, gradually rising line which turns a corner and starts to shoot nearly straight up. Technological knowledge is somewhere on that corner.

Couple exploding advances in computer power with the things it can do: robotics, biotechnology and nanotechnology for a start (nanotechnology being the construction of microscopic machines), and you end up with an amazing array of new, affordable goods and services and vastly improved medical care.

Think back to the world the way it was 100 years ago, and using that scale consider that we may plausibly have 100 years of change over the next 25 years. This will be challenging and disorienting, but it will likely mean great advances in productivity – the amount of goods the average American worker produces in an hour.

This will mean growth, jobs and tremendous wealth. Adjusting to rapid change and making sure that new, powerful technologies are used effectively and responsibly will be a major preoccupation of individuals, business and government. Those with the most education and initiative will do the best financially, but jobs and opportunity will be widespread. As President Reagan liked to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet!"

That, at least, is our potential. The future will always hold surprises, both good and bad, but right now the prospects for greater and growing prosperity over the coming quarter of a century are unprecedented and very exciting.

Study of Nation's History Advocated

By grinding wheat grown by Wisconsin farmers (see picture at left), Rep. Petri helped to inaugurate President George Washington's restored grist mill in Alexandria, Virginia on April 12. Virginia Senator George Allen was also on hand to grind locally-grown wheat.

As Vice Chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Rep. Petri spoke at the event, emphasizing the importance of teaching history in America's schools.

"George III, who had, probably, respect but no great affection for George Washington, said that 'if General Washington, after beating our soldiers on the field of battle, has surrendered his commission and returned to his farm at Mt. Vernon, he is the greatest man alive in the world today,' Petri said.

"So, that respect is important," he added. "We have to figure out how to transmit that to future generations. The fact is that today in our country Washington is not taught in the schools much anymore. His picture has disappeared from the classrooms. And even the teaching of American history is no longer required in many of our leading universities.

"And, of course, we all know, 'Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it,' and there are some things in the past that we do not want our children and grandchildren and future generations to have to relearn if they can benefit by some study."



Come to Rep. Petri's Citizen Hours! See page 4.

Accomplishments So Far

Does anything ever get done in Washington? Yes, actually. Putting important new war-related laws to one side for now, here's some of what we've accomplished so far during the current 107th Congress:

✓ **Job Creation and Worker Assistance Act of 2002**

This bill provides unemployment relief for people who lost their jobs during the economic slowdown.

✓ **Education Reform**

The new "No Child Left Behind" law improves educational opportunities for every child in America by holding schools accountable to parents and by providing states and local school districts with unprecedented new flexibility and giving new choices to parents.

✓ **Across the Board Tax Rate Reductions**

One year ago Congress cut federal income tax rates and sent early refunds to a majority of taxpayers.

Economists agree that strong consumer spending helped to make the recession unusually short and shallow. Last summer's refund checks arrived just in time to bolster consumer spending and helped the economy to grow during the fourth quarter of the year despite the disruptions caused by the September 11th attacks.

The Washington Post, on March 2nd, acknowledged the direct correlation between strong consumer spending and tax cuts, saying, "One reason consumers have been able to increase their spending is that their incomes have resumed rising... after-tax or "disposable" personal income rose 1.6 percent in January in part because of the tax-cutting legislation enacted last year."

✓ **Marriage Penalty Cut**

Until recently, one quirk of our tax laws was that if two working individuals decided to say "I do," they could (depending on their incomes) find themselves paying substantially more as a married couple than their combined taxes would have been if they had remained single. Last year's tax legislation largely eliminated this "marriage penalty" as part of a commonsense effort to strengthen families and secure our children's future.

✓ **Doubling the Child Tax Credit to \$1,000**

With this change, the Child Tax Credit rose from \$500 to \$600 per child in 2001. In 2005 it will be \$700, and finally \$1,000 in 2010.

✓ **Veterans' Opportunities Act**

This new law targets additional funding and assistance to veterans and their survivors most in need, such as disabled veterans who require specially altered housing or automobiles.

✓ **Campaign Finance Reform**

Supposedly high on Congress' agenda for at least a decade, with my support the current Congress finally approved and the President signed campaign finance reform to ban "soft money" contributions, among other provisions. While the new law is flawed, it should help to restore accountability to our electoral process. Its most troublesome aspects will face serious court challenges.

Of course, the House has done much more than pass the items above. In addition to the many vital defense and domestic security laws approved by Congress over the past year, we have approved a wide range of important proposals which we hope will receive due attention by the Senate in the months ahead.



Recognition from Seniors, Taxpayers

For his record in Congress, Rep. Petri was recently named "Senior Friendly" by the **60 Plus Association**, a non-partisan senior citizens group with more than half a million members nationally, over 9,500 in Wisconsin and some 850 in the 6th Congressional District.

At a March event, **Americans for Tax Reform** named Rep. Petri a "Hero of the Taxpayer" for his "strong pro-taxpayer votes over the past twelve months; a consistent record of voting with taxpayers and with families."

Also in March, the **National Taxpayers Union** announced that Rep. Petri had been designated a "Taxpayers' Friend" for "consistently voting to reduce and control the burden on American taxpayers" during 2001.

High School Students: Service Academies Want You!

It's not too early for high school juniors to start thinking about seeking appointment to the U.S. service academies – the Military Academy at West Point, NY; the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md.; the Air Force Academy at Colorado Springs, Colo.; and the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, NY.

Nominations are based solely on the recommendations of an independent, bipartisan selection committee comprised of 6th District citizens. Those seeking nomination for the 2003-2004 school year should contact one of my offices listed in this newsletter. Also, information and computer links to the academies' web sites can be found in the Academy Page section of my web site located at:

www.house.gov/petri/academy.htm

Let Me Help You

Have you ever tried to get help from the federal government? No representative can order agency officials around, but with the help of my staff it's often possible to get answers from federal bureaucracies where citizens have found only silence or confusion. Here are some examples of my recent casework successes:

Problem: A young woman from Fond du Lac wanted to enlist in the Army, believing this would be a good opportunity to serve her country and obtain an education. She was found medically ineligible because of cosmetic surgery she had undergone. She and her recruiter applied for a medical waiver feeling the past surgery in no way would limit her performance in the Army. The waiver was denied, but she was determined to serve in the Army.

Solution: After I made an inquiry with the Department of the Army, the Recruiting Command Surgeon had the young woman resubmit her application for a medical waiver. After further examination of her medical eligibility, the Recruiting Command Surgeon determined that this young woman was qualified to enlist in the Army.

Problem: A woman from Oshkosh signed up for Medicare when she became eligible at age 65. Her husband was still working and had health insurance coverage for both of them. Because she already had good health insurance, she chose not to enroll in Medicare Part B, the part of Medicare that covers physician care.

When her husband retired and they were no longer covered under his employer's health insurance, she went to enroll in Medicare Part B. She was told that she would have to pay 20% higher monthly premiums and go six months without coverage because she had delayed enrollment for several years. She had been told earlier, however, that if she kept her husband's employer provided insurance, she could defer her Medicare Part B enrollment without penalty.

Solution: She contacted me to help correct the error. After working with the Social Security Administration, my staff discovered that there was indeed an error and the woman was able to enroll in Medicare Part B without a penalty.

Problem: A Marquette County man was receiving too little Social Security and had been unable to enroll in Medicare because the Social Security Administration (SSA) believed him to be one year younger than his true age.

Solution: My staff brought a copy of his birth certificate and baptismal record to the attention of SSA officials who corrected their files. His Medicare coverage was fully instituted and his monthly Social Security check was increased to reflect his age and the amount he deserved.

Problem: A small company in central Wisconsin was bidding on a \$6 million contract that required it to be on a GSA approval list. To get on the list, an application had to be submitted, but the company was told by GSA not to submit the forms as new ones would be necessary. However, the new forms weren't available soon enough to allow the company to go through the GSA process and still meet the deadline for the bidding.

Solution: My staff contacted officials at GSA to put the company in touch with the appropriate contract officials and ensure that its request for GSA approval was expedited in time to allow the successful bid on the contract.



During an April visit to Washington, members of the Wisconsin Farm Bureau met with Rep. Petri to discuss dairy legislation and other agricultural issues, the environment and rising health care costs.

Memorial Day in Wartime

With our military in combat abroad and patrolling the skies at home, the meaning of Memorial Day should be clearer to those too young to remember the wars of the past century. As Americans we can choose whether or not to support the policies of our government, but the debt we owe to those who defend our freedoms is not optional.

One of my former colleagues in Congress once suggested that we could do away with most of our defense spending, arguing that if the Soviet Union invaded, we could overcome the Red Army through passive resistance including, for instance, putting sugar in the gasoline tanks of their vehicles! Most of us, however, think it is better to fight for our freedoms and values while we still have them. We think it is better to confront the enemy abroad rather than suffer additional attacks at home such as the ones at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

When the stakes are high, we have to ask our young men and women to put themselves between us and the enemy. In doing so, they risk their lives, their health and their opportunities to live long and happy lives surrounded by friends and families. Sometimes, protecting your children can mean losing the chance to see them grow to become adults and parents in their own right. Some can reject or ignore the debt we owe our defenders, but it remains just the same.

While we owe the most to those who served in America's armed forces, respect and honor are also due to those who fought alongside our troops. In Wisconsin, this especially includes our Hmong residents and citizens who, after all, are here because of the reprisals targeted at our allies by the Communists after Congress withdrew funding for the war effort in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in 1973-75.

Respect and honor are, and should be, the highest tribute we pay to our defenders. But, America's veterans also deserve the practical aid and support we have long promised them. Accordingly, the first session of the current Congress produced bills signed into law in the last few months that will reshape services and benefits provided to veterans. Most notable is the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act which will provide \$1.4 billion over the next five years to

renew the VA's requirement to maintain capacity in its specialized disability programs, such as those dealing with severe mental illness, spinal cord injury and blind rehabilitation.

The Veterans Education and Benefits Expansion Act provides long overdue increases and adjustments to several veterans programs by authorizing \$3.1 billion for increases in Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance, the home loan guaranty, grants for specially adapted housing for severely disabled veterans, and the burial and funeral expense benefit, and includes a much sought after 46 percent increase in GI Bill benefits to ensure that veterans get the education they need to move to the private sector successfully after leaving the armed forces.

The Congress also took the opportunity to provide needed assistance to often over-looked segments of the veteran population. The Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act authorizes \$1 billion which, among other provisions, provides 2,000 new Section 8 housing vouchers over the next 4 years to help veterans undergoing treatment for mental illness and substance use, and increases the current authorization level to \$60 million for the VA's Homeless Grant and Per Diem Program in FY 2002.

Congress ensured that blind veterans would be provided the opportunity to live independently with the passage of Veterans Service Dog and Health Care Improvement Act of 2001, which provides disabled vets with service dogs to assist them in performing various activities of daily living and protects certain VA specialized care programs for the blind.

These four bills, all signed into law by President Bush, are just a few examples of how the 107th Congress made veterans a priority during 2001.

Finally, the House made a strong declaration in favor of veterans in March when the Committee on the Budget recommended a record \$56.9 billion FY 2003 budget for the VA (a 12% increase over FY 2002), including an additional \$2.8 billion over President Bush's initial proposal. The committee also virtually guaranteed the demise of a provision in the FY 2003 proposal that would have asked Priority Group 7 veterans and their private supplemental health care insurers to pick up the tab on a \$1,500 annual deductible.

Around the 6th District

Winnebago County and the state government have saved \$853,000 thanks to a provision Rep. Petri and Sen. Herbert Kohl recently succeeded in getting through Congress.

In 1996, property on the west side of Wittman Regional Airport in Oshkosh was acquired to increase crowd safety during the annual Experimental Aviation Association (EAA) convention. This project was funded by a federal Airport Improvement Program grant and was part of a Federal Aviation Administration-approved Airport Master Plan which was primarily designed to enable the airport to meet federal safety recommendations by increasing the distance between the airshow spectator line and aircraft activity.

The property was acquired by eminent domain for \$200,000 with the federal government paying 90 percent of the cost, and the rest being borne by the county and the state. However, the previous owner won a court judgment for an additional \$947,000. Legislation

was necessary in order to keep the federal share of the purchase cost at 90 percent instead of requiring the county and state taxpayers to carry the added burden.

Lakeshore Technical College has been awarded \$500,000 in federal funding to train realtime television captioners. The college applied for funding to support broadcasting compliance with the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which requires captioning for the deaf of all new programming broadcasts by 2006. Rep. Petri was a lead advocate of the funding in the House of Representatives.

The Weis Earth Science Museum in Menasha has won a \$500,000 federal grant to create exhibits in the museum as part of its educational programming, primarily for use by K-12 students and their teachers in regional public, parochial, and private schools, and also by home schooled children. Rep. Petri was the lead House advocate for the funding.

Keeping in Touch

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call or write. In addition to the usual "old fashioned" addresses and numbers on page 1, you can contact me by e-mail. Due to the high volume of messages coming to my old e-mail address from all over the country, I am now asking everybody from the 6th District to use the form linked to the front page of my web site found at

www.house.gov/petri/

This form filters out "spam" e-mail, which can number in the hundreds or thousands on any given day. When writing by e-mail, please include your name and postal address to guarantee a response.

Also, for those who would like to hear from me more frequently, I put out an occasional e-mail newsletter discussing issues currently receiving attention in Congress. If you would like to be added to my e-mail distribution list, drop me a note via my web site as explained above.

Internships for College Students

Would you like to learn more about our federal government—especially how Congress really works? If so, you might consider an internship in my Washington office. Interns in my office are unpaid, but I cooperate with schools that are willing to offer credit for the experience. The work required is not complicated, but it is important and provides a chance to get a first hand look at Congress and government service.

For further information, check my web site at
www.house.gov/petri/intern.htm

Representative Tom Petri's May 2002 CITIZEN HOURS SCHEDULED

Citizen Hours Scheduled

During the 106th Congress I spent 234 days working in Wisconsin, held 56 citizen hours in 26 cities, hosted 42 town meetings in 18 locations, and made 574 stops in 87 cities and towns.

In town meetings I meet with constituents to discuss national issues in a group setting. Citizen hours, on the other hand, provide an opportunity to meet one-on-one with individuals who need help with Social Security or veterans benefits, who want to ask for help getting into the U.S. Military Academies, who want privately to discuss problems with farm programs, with the Internal Revenue Service and the like, or who simply want to express opinions about issues of national concern.

My latest round of citizen hours will take place from May 28 through May 31 at 14 locations throughout central Wisconsin. Please come and express your opinions!

TUESDAY, MAY 28th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—**WAUTOMA**
Waushara County Job Center
205 East Main Street
Conference Room

11:00 - 12:00 Noon—**GREEN LAKE**
Caestecker Public Library
518 Hill Street, Conference Room

1:30 - 2:45 p.m.—**OSHKOSH**
City Hall, 215 Church Avenue
Room 406

3:30 - 4:45 p.m.—**FOND DU LAC**
City-County Government Center
160 South Macy Street
Meeting Rooms F & G

WEDNESDAY, MAY 29th

10:30 - 11:45 a.m.—**MANITOWOC**
City Hall, 900 Quay Street
First Floor Conference Room

1:00 - 2:00 p.m.—**BRILLION**
Brillion Community Center
120 Center Street
Assembly Room

3:00 - 4:00 p.m.—**ELKHART LAKE**
Grashorn Civic Center
84 North Lake Street

THURSDAY, MAY 30th

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—**NEW LONDON**
Municipal Building
215 North Shawano Street
City Council Chambers

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.—**LITTLE CHUTE**
Gerard H. Van Hoof Civic Center
625 Grand Avenue, South Room #1

3:00 - 4:15 p.m.—**MENASHA**
City Hall, 140 Main Street
City Council Chambers

FRIDAY, MAY 31st

9:00 - 10:00 a.m.—**TOMAH**
City Hall, 819 Superior Avenue
City Council Chambers

11:00 - 12:00 Noon—**MAUSTON**
Hatch Public Library, 111 West State Street
Community Room

1:30 - 2:30 p.m.—**ADAMS**
Adams County Library
101 South Main Street
Meeting Room

3:30 - 4:30 p.m.—**MONTELLO**
Marquette County Courthouse
77 West Park Street
County Board Room